

April 23, 2011

Dear Dr. Teutsch,

Thanks for the opportunity to review the report on the Inglewood Oil Fields. After reading the report in the face of the data available to use I think that LA County Department of Public Health has done a solid job. In light of the many types of confounding exposures that could occur it would be hard to exactly pinpoint the actual source responsible for significant findings. My review of the data employed, the strategy for analyses, and the resulting findings, all appear reasonable and indicated. However, having said that what may be useful for the public use of the report is to avoid the use of epidemiologic jargon in presenting and explaining the findings. Most of comments are actually directed at the Executive Summary as comments are easier to understand later in the report when there are accompanying charts, figures and graphs. As they say a picture is worth a thousand words is well illustrated in the sections that follow the Summary.

Let me give a few examples. As statisticians we understand when and why to use leading cause of deaths versus all causes of death. It might help in the report to help the reader understand that leading causes of death are commonly used as it helps to sharpen our focus on those things that occur most often and are often the targets of policies and procedures. This stands in contrast to using all causes of deaths which may include rare events or unusual circumstances that would not be the best use of developing policies and procedures except in unusual cases. If rare events can be shown to coincide with petroleum based exposures then it would be very helpful as a warning sign for further investigations and examinations. However at this point this does not seem to be the case but it could help those reading better understand the difference in the use of the two types of approaches to mortality statistics.

Also since most individuals are not familiar with when low birth weight is really problematic birth weight would suggest giving the number or range. I think the extra detail not only serves to let people know what the figure is for clinically defined low birth weight but also is just good public health information for the general public. I think that the group who has requested this report may benefit from any additional health information that can be imparted.

Another example of where a bit more detail would be helpful to facilitate ease in reviewing the report is to help the reader understand early in the Summary what the expected health consequences would be as determined by scientific data on health consequences from exposures to petroleum. While our knowledge is still developing in this area there is a body of information that can be provided to help the reader know what in general the responses are to petroleum exposures. I think the first thing that most individuals will look for is cancer in any form but there are other possibilities and it would help to just do a bit of elaboration so that as one reads the findings that they have in mind whether they have experienced any of the association consequences.

Also another area of helpful clarification is on page 12 where you talk about the risk of colorectal cancer and the dangers of cooking meat at a high temperature. Most people will see nothing wrong with this statement as one successful public health message has been that cooked meat is better than raw meat. I might have said that cooking meats particularly grilling beef, fish and pork at high temperatures produces carcinogens from the chargrill process. Similar comments of avoidance of being near smoking to giving examples of what near is would be great public health education while at the same time presenting the data on the oil field exposure.

These are relatively minor comments meant to enhance the usefulness of the report. The report as it stands reflects good scientific practices. It is also always heartwarming to see data being used in support of community questions. Keep up the good work and if I can be of any further assistance let me know.

Sincerely,

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